

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLICATIONS

I. BOOK REVIEWS

MUNICIPAL FUNCTIONS. By Herman G. James. New York: D. Appleton & Company. National Municipal League Series. \$2.

The public has been rather liberally supplied with books and articles, descriptive and critical, relating to the framework of municipal government, the organization and methods of its administrative departments, and the methods of popular control over its composition and activities. But however well devised a city government may be, from the standpoint both of representativeness and efficiency, it can be neither truly representative nor really effective if it issues from and acts upon a community which is without "clear notions of what a city should and can be expected to do." The fundamental purpose of the book in hand, as stated in the preface, is to give the municipal citizen an intelligent opinion on the needs of his city, so that he may be in a position to discriminate among the many desirable objects of city activity and among the various possible means of accomplishing these objects. The author attempts to do this by giving "a simple but comprehensive survey of the whole field of municipal endeavor . . . a survey which every intelligent member of the community can readily comprehend." The book is also "intended for use as a text-book in college classes."

The book well follows out its expressed purpose. It supplies comprehensive, accurate, practical information and criticism concerning the needs and opportunities of organized city life and concerning the requirements that must be fulfilled in order adequately to meet these needs and opportunities. It is unique in its scope and emphasis. Not only is its interest in action rather than in organization, but within the field of municipal activity it

gives secondary attention to administrative methods and policies and mechanical means. Its primary objects are to show the nature and scope of city activities (including not only the activities which cities do undertake but also those which they should undertake if they are to fulfill the opportunities and obligations of modern city government), the difficulties—political, legal, financial, and popular—likely to be encountered in carrying out such undertakings, the various considerations that should govern choice of policies and methods, and the various interests that must be regarded in all that the city does. For the more technical and mechanical sides of municipal administration the book contains simple statements which supply all that the general reader and student need undertake to know in first instance. This is well illustrated in the description of the different methods of water purification and of sewage disposal.

In this treatment all the varied activities of cities are covered, and the interconnections of different branches adequately indicated. The problems of small as well as large cities are considered; the general practical usefulness of the book is probably enhanced by the fact that the conditions of the smaller cities are foremost in the mind of the author. At all proper points of the discussion the occasions for local adaptations are recognized. Despite the compendiousness and conciseness of the work, it escapes dryness, because of its well-proportioned treatment and because of its close application to actual needs and conditions, combined with its freedom from statistics and needless technical details.

The work is not merely descriptive; it is also critical; and in its criticisms it not only shows the weaknesses in present

practices, but also points out better ways. Though in its estimations and strictures it is discriminating and unprejudiced, it is pronouncedly social in spirit, the welfare of the general mass of the citizens being its criterion for judgment and recommendation. Finally, though frankly progressive in its attitude, it is not blindly so; this is well exemplified in the discussion of the regulation of public utilities, where exceptional definiteness is given to the familiar caution that although the public benefit must be the controlling consideration in the city's policy toward private corporations operating public utilities, yet the voters must never lose sight of the fact that the imposition of terms too burdensome will defeat the very purpose of the regulation.

Throughout the work a special utility of the volume lies in its indication of common delusions concerning the considerations that should determine the policies of a city; in this way, for example, at many points the costliness of false economy is shown by pointing out the consequences—affecting the health, comfort, efficiency or happiness of the community, and, in many instances, increasing the financial burden upon the community—that follow the neglect of some function or the choice of a cheaper way of fulfilling it, in pursuing a policy of superficial saving. On the other hand, at no point is there any disregard of the due importance of the financial aspects of a city's problem in choice of policies and means.

In the short concluding chapter, two questions of fundamental importance for a city's work are briefly broached. The first is the familiar question as to the proper relation of the American city to the state government as concerns scope of functions and choice of means. Here the author would have the cities given, as in Germany, large and general powers of municipal enterprise, freed from "the doctrine of limited powers, strict construction and legislative interference," but con-

trolled in the carrying out of their powers by an efficient central administrative department for local government, manned by a body of experts a "model for which might be found in the English local government board." The other question relates to the order of importance of the various municipal activities, a question of practical significance, because no city can do everything at once in the way of extending or improving existing activities. In the order suggested, functions meeting the elemental needs of the community (in connection with public safety and public works) and provision of public education, are followed by social welfare activities. Not until all these needs are adequately provided for should the city turn to its luxuries, such as elaborate and expensive buildings and boulevards, ornamental street lighting, and elegant civic centers. The concluding sentences of the book well express what, as already intimated, seems to be a controlling motive of the book. "The chief warning that seems to be needed by American cities in guiding them on their march upward is that until more attention is devoted to the more obscure phases of social welfare work, less money should be spent on the more showy aspects of city improvement. The keynote of the new American city should not be grandeur but democracy, a real democracy of social conditions."

What makes Professor James' book of such distinct value for the practical reformer and the public-minded citizen is that in following out the motive just suggested, the work nowhere loses itself in indiscriminating propaganda and exhortation; it is accurate and impartial. Moreover, it is not too technical for the general reader and is thorough and complete enough to serve as a general guide for a college class. The volume clearly adds prestige to the series of which it forms a part.

F. W. COKER.

Ohio State University.